

**Woman, Thou Art Almost Loosed!**

*The Rise of Women Ministers in the Nineteenth-Century Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church*

David Swartz

January 13, 2003

## Introduction

In 1933 Mae Shupe penned these words:

It really is only a square deal, is it not, that a woman who can do just as good work as a man, and they can, should have the same rights and privileges. And the right to be ordained belongs to the woman who has earned it by meeting the requirements in the way of study and service. . . . The church needs women's ministry. It needs real women, strong intelligent women, consecrated women, who are willing to use their every talent and attainment to the glory of God.<sup>1</sup>

Shupe was pastor for many years of a Michigan congregation in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church—a circumstance that now seems rather anomalous as historians look back at a theologically conservative church heavily influenced by and positioned within the heyday of North American Protestant fundamentalism. But there was a catch clearly evident in Shupe's tirade: neither Shupe—who preferred to be called Reverend Mae—nor any of the other 500 women ministers who served from 1883 to the mid-1960s was ordained in the same sense as men were. She was first licensed, then “approved” or “dedicated” as a “ministering sister” in a separate two-step process parallel to male licensure and ordination. Shupe also was not permitted to officiate at weddings or work long-term as senior pastor of her church. Public ministry—even spiritual leadership—did not mean full equality.

Still, Shupe and the other women leaders in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church enjoyed significantly more ministry latitude than most women in evangelical churches. Not being ordained in the same way men were didn't keep MBC women from engaging in an expansive range of church responsibilities. They wrote testimonies and articles in their denominational paper, organized and preached at camp meetings, founded churches in inner cities, taught as faculty members in denominational colleges, served as senior pastors, and converted and baptized new believers. In one year alone, 1901, a mission in Owen Sound,

---

<sup>1</sup> Mae Shupe, unpublished paper (1933), Missionary Church Archives.

Ontario, led by women recorded 280 meetings, 774 visits to saloons, 57 cottage prayer meetings, seventeen children's meetings, and eleven open-air meetings.<sup>2</sup> Their feats were chronicled at length and loudly in the *Gospel Banner*, the publication organ of MBC, usually through bi-monthly mission updates and occasionally in multi-page spreads with photographs and accompanying stories. A full one of every eight churches in the MBC denomination was founded by a woman preacher.<sup>3</sup>

Had Mae Shupe grown up in the even more patriarchal setting of her denomination's forbears, the Mennonite church, her words would have sounded even fierier—if they had sounded at all. Most traditional Mennonites in the late 1800s not only banned women from speaking during a church service but also enforced segregated seating during church services. Men and women in many Mennonite congregations ritually entered and exited the church building through separate doors. Certainly teaching, preaching, and testifying were out of bounds to women. In fact, many Mennonite leaders opposed the innovation of Sunday school partly because women were sometimes allowed to teach.<sup>4</sup> Female leadership was limited to organizing women's sewing circles to support mission work.<sup>5</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church was founded in 1883 by the merging of the Swankites and the Evangelical United Mennonites, both of which had roots in Mennonite patriarchy and neither of which included women in public ministry. But that quickly changed. The number of licensed women ministers in MBC was five by 1890, nineteen by 1895, 94 by 1900, and 220 by 1910.<sup>6</sup> For a denomination with only 37 churches in 1883 and 133 in 1908

---

<sup>2</sup> Eileen Lageer, *Merging Streams* (Elkhart, Ind.: Bethel Publishing, 1979), 75.

<sup>3</sup> Everek Richard Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church* (Elkhart, Ind.: Bethel Publishing, 1958), 251.

<sup>4</sup> Theron Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1988), 227.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>6</sup> Jason C. Garnaat, "In Memory of Her," *Reflections* (Missionary Church Historical Society, Fall 1995).

and a church membership of 2,076 in 1883 and 6,351 in 1908, the number of women in public ministry was remarkable.<sup>7</sup>

The statistics on licensed women in MBC by the advent of the twentieth century point, then, to a tremendous departure during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s from the denomination's Mennonite roots. This raises the question of how early leaders of MBC acquired their progressive views. Given the denomination's Mennonite patriarchal heritage, how did the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church (a predecessor to what is today the Missionary Church) so quickly and almost completely embrace female participation and leadership in its ecclesiology? I suggest the answer to this question begins to form when three aspects of MBC ecclesiastical life are considered: The MBC included women in ministry so early in its history and with such ease because of: 1) the denomination's strong affinity with holiness groups (despite not joining them); 2) the denomination's sympathy with nineteenth-century societal reform efforts; and, 3) the ability of the denominational leadership to compromise between two competing inclinations among its constituents.

Studies of women in American religious life, particularly within evangelicalism, have proliferated in recent years. What scholars have uncovered has surprised many who view contemporary evangelicalism as uniformly hostile to women in church leadership. To note just a few examples: Catherine Brekus reinserted into religious history the stories of more than one hundred female preachers from 1740-1845 forgotten by modern-day historians.<sup>8</sup> Janette Hassey uncovered thousands of female preachers in revivalist, proto-fundamentalist

---

<sup>7</sup> Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 63.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

circles—some even at Moody Bible Institute—in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Nancy Hardesty argued that the nineteenth-century American woman’s rights movement had its roots in evangelical revivalism. And Margaret Bendroth traced the decline of women in public ministry in fundamentalism far into the twentieth century—a decline that assumes women had a role in the first place. Even this increasing hostility was tempered, Bendroth writes, by the movement’s dependence on women to bolster institutional growth.<sup>10</sup>

Though each scholar notes that the ministry of women rarely entailed the benefit of ordination, none offers a comprehensive theory about why certain denominations encouraged women to preach and pastor. Max Weber, in his 1933 theory of women in non-privileged classes, spoke to the issue of denominational differences regarding women in leadership. He proposed that “the religion of the disprivileged classes . . . is characterized by a tendency to allot equality to women.”<sup>11</sup> However provocative, the theory is broad and undeveloped.

Robert Anderson’s *Vision of the Disinherited* develops the idea of social position and its effect on faith experience more fully than Weber, though Anderson curiously ignores any links between social position and the inclusion of women in public church ministry. He does point out that Pentecostals “placed a higher premium upon ecstasy, and thereby directed less of their energies into the development of those characteristics more useful for rising into the middle class.”<sup>12</sup> Anderson further distinguishes between holiness (to which MBC had significant ties) and Pentecostal social aspirations and religious ecstasy. The split between the two movements was occasioned by holiness efforts to limit religious ecstasy and Pentecostal instincts to embrace it. This divide generally permitted holiness advocates to aspire toward a

---

<sup>9</sup> Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Ministry around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 104.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 152.

middle-class social position. For Pentecostals religious ecstasy became “a surrogate for success in the social struggle.”<sup>13</sup> If, in fact, Pentecostals were more socially disprivileged than those in the holiness movement, we might expect in light of Weber’s thesis a greater degree of female ministry from Pentecostals than holiness-affiliated groups like MBC.

While Pentecostals extended the levels of religious ecstasy further than holiness groups, the emphasis on experience still predominated. As I will demonstrate later in regard to MBC, emphasis on emotion-driven spiritual experience and revival generally leads to greater participation by women. Melvin Dieter, in particular, sees this phenomenon as prevailing in the nineteenth-century holiness movement. He writes, “It was the theology of the movement and the essential nature of the place of public testimony in the holiness experience which gave many an otherwise timid woman the authority and the power to speak out ‘as the Holy Spirit led her.’”<sup>14</sup> For Dieter the particular theological and ecclesiastical leanings of the holiness movement directly led to female preaching (though not full equality).

Grant Wacker brings a broader, nearly universally applicable paradigm to his understanding of the role of women in the ecclesiastical life of faith communities. In *Heaven Below*, his survey of early Pentecostalism in America, Wacker aligns the Pentecostal impulse to return to original things, to be guided purely by the Holy Spirit with a pragmatic drive to do what works, to “work within the social and cultural expectations of the age.”<sup>15</sup> The competing impulses of this primitivist-pragmatist construction, claims Wacker, are simultaneously contradictory and powerfully effective in building a dynamic religious community and in releasing women to preach the Gospel.

---

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, *Vision*, 152.

<sup>14</sup> Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 42.

<sup>15</sup> Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 12-13.

Margaret Bendroth observes a similar pragmatist bent in early fundamentalism, much like Wacker sees in early Pentecostalism. The democratizing winds of revivalism blew strongly through early fundamentalism as evangelists used pragmatic methods instead of relying on traditional customs to save souls. She writes, “In the heat of revival fervor, nineteenth-century evangelists cared little for social conventions or ecclesiastical rules against women preachers: all stood equal at the foot of the Cross.”<sup>16</sup> The willingness to do what worked (and their observation that women running church services and saving souls did work), Bendroth asserts, led holiness, proto-fundamentalist groups (with which MBC had connections) to, at the very least, grudgingly accept women as preachers.

Mark Chaves attempts a more specialized sociological study of women within American Christian churches. *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* charts formal denominational policy regarding women’s ordination. Chaves incisively points out that the nineteenth-century women’s movement and interdenominational networks drove groups toward the ordination of women. Specifically, he notes that “the more a denomination was connected to denominations that already ordained women, the higher the probability that it would begin to ordain women itself in a given year.” Chaves also cites internal pressures such as the centralization of authority and the presence or absence of an autonomous women’s mission society that lead to inclusion or exclusion of women in leadership.<sup>17</sup>

Chaves fails, however, to consider those denominations that didn’t adopt a pro-female ordination policy. MBC, for instance, never “ordained” long-time pastor Mae Shupe. The denomination recognized their women preachers in a “separate, but nearly equal” policy, allowing them expansive but slightly limited public roles. In a sense, that hardly matters given

---

<sup>16</sup> Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 61, 140.

the phenomenon Chaves calls “loose coupling,” the idea that rules about ordination don’t reflect or shape the practice of women in ministry and leadership as much as we might expect. Still, I intend to suggest that Chaves’s identification of certain external and internal pressures are at times germane to denominations—especially those in the late nineteenth century—like MBC that involve women in roles of spiritual leadership. The case of MBC additionally suggests that by ignoring denominations which used female preachers but did not ordain them at all or in the same way as men perhaps leaves out an important part of the story: the numbers of female ministers in MBC and other non-ordaining holiness groups overwhelm Chaves’s denominations that granted full equality to women.

In this paper I test the various hypotheses of Weber, Anderson, Dieter, Wacker, Bendroth, and Chaves by analyzing the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church, a denomination that began involving women in ministry about three decades after 1853, the year the first woman was ordained in any church in the United States. I find that Weber’s theory is inconclusive at best. More helpful are Dieter and Wacker. MBC connections to the holiness movement were significant, and their common emphasis on experience and revivalism led to significant steps for women. Wacker’s primitivist-pragmatist paradigm is shown to contain significant explanatory power. MBC “ordained” women, I find, primarily on pragmatic grounds. Chaves’s theories, I contend, while provocative and helpful, do not gain overall support from the case study of MBC and its inclusion of women in ministry leadership.

### **Holiness ties**

The initial wave of women ministers in MBC clearly resembles the revivalist sensibilities of the holiness movement. First, the social and theological nature of holiness groups and MBC contributed toward an anti-traditionalism that worked to encourage female

participation. Second, the revivalist-influenced emphasis on experience—in the form of free-flowing, emotional camp meetings—lent itself to the rise of women in MBC. A third MBC resemblance to holiness orientation was the adoption of a theology of perfection. Finally, the pro-woman rationale of the founding leaders and the women ministers themselves mirror the staunch biblicism of Methodism, a denomination heavily influenced by holiness ideals. Specifically, arguments grounded in biblicism from Methodists were echoed (and often literally copied from publications like *Guide to Holiness*) by MBC advocates.

### *Protest against traditionalism*

Donald Dayton suggests that the anti-traditional nature of the holiness movement made possible the rise of female participation in leadership. Specifically, holiness groups—and other emerging traditions like the Quakers, Unitarians, the Seventh-Day Adventists, and Christian Scientists—were in protest against the hierarchies of the traditional church.<sup>18</sup> R.V. Pierard notes that an increasing number of holiness evangelists preaching John Wesley's teaching of entire sanctification and Christian perfection circulated throughout the United States in the mid-1800s. These evangelists were not commissioned by their denominations (usually Methodist) and began a program of camp meetings, independent presses, and nondenominational associations.<sup>19</sup> The rebellious nature of the nascent American holiness movement encouraged the development of practices contrary to their ecclesiastical roots. One of those innovative practices was the participation of women in religious leadership.

MBC emerged out of a hierarchical tradition staunchly opposed to women in leadership. The story of Mennonite women through the turn of the century is one of

---

<sup>18</sup> Melvin Easterday Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 44. Dieter discusses wings of Methodism that challenged the opposition to women leadership.

<sup>19</sup> Donald W. Dayton, *The American Holiness Movement* (Wilmore, Kentucky: B.L. Fisher Library, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1971).

maintaining traditional roles. In keeping with the gender sensibilities of broader American society, women were relegated to the home, where they cooked food, laundered clothes, bore and nurtured children, and created a comfortable abode for her husband and children. They rarely worked outside their own homes, except perhaps to help another woman in a different home or to help her husband with field work. But women seldom, if ever, represented her family in business affairs. As Sharon Klingelsmith aptly puts it, “Mennonites have been a quiet people and the women among them have been an even quieter group.”<sup>20</sup> This quietness was grounded in keeping men and women in separate spheres: women in the home and men outside it. This is not to say that women had no influence; it was simply channeled through their husbands and children by way of the home.

In the religious sphere women were similarly quiet. Through the late 1800s, women and men sat apart in church to keep from being distracted by—and from distracting—the other gender. Women rarely, if ever, spoke during a church meeting. When they did speak, it was only to teach other women or young children during the Sunday schools that were flourishing by the 1890s.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, church authorities were more relaxed about the print media, but even there men predominated. John F. Funk, a Moody associate who began a new church journal called *Herald of Truth* in 1864, published five articles by women in that first year. Those articles comprised 1% of the paper’s volume. That modest figure rose to 3.8% by 1884 and 11.6% by 1904.<sup>22</sup> Rarely, however, did women write editorials, conference reports, or articles of theological import.<sup>23</sup>

Mennonites based their subordination of women on certain passages in scripture. They took literally Paul’s injunction in I Timothy 2:12 to keep silent during meetings: “But I suffer

---

<sup>20</sup> Sharon Klingelsmith, “Women in the Mennonite Church, 1900-1930,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54 (July 1980), 163.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>22</sup> These figures do not reflect anonymous articles and obituaries possibly written by women.

<sup>23</sup> Theron Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1988), 311.

not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. If a women did have a question, she was to ask her husband at home” (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). As Jim Juhnke asserts, “Mennonites read male priority in the Old Testament story of creation and in New Testament injunctions for women to be subordinate and silent in the church.”<sup>24</sup> Based on definite theological assumptions and practical enforcement of these commitments, restriction of women involvement in the ecclesiastical workings of Mennonite churches and conferences was nearly complete.

Certain pressures, however, threatened male hegemony in the mid-1800s. The Great Awakenings of the nineteenth century featured a handful of traits foreign and hostile to the Mennonite ethos of formalism. Specifically, holiness and revivalism, with their accompanying chaotic tendencies, worried Mennonite leaders.

These leaders had reason to be concerned because many in their congregations had grown more economically prosperous and were described by their leaders as spiritually lethargic. Many younger Mennonites saw revivalists outside their ranks who preached a more vibrant, missions-oriented spirituality. Beulah Stauffer Hostetler notes that “many of the young people, normally not baptized until in their twenties, were attending revival meetings held by other denominations and subsequently joining those churches.”<sup>25</sup> In Upper Milford, Pennsylvania, William Gehman in 1853 began holding prayer meetings in which a new spiritual awakening was nurtured along by Sunday afternoon and evening services of prayer and “religious exercises.”<sup>26</sup> These exercises were characterized by Methodist-style conversions, protracted meetings, and the mourner’s bench. Such innovations were allowed at the Mennonite congregation in Upper Milford, but only after resistance and more than a little

---

<sup>24</sup> James C. Juhnke, “The Role of Women in the Mennonite Transition from Traditionalism to Denominationalism,” *Mennonite Life* 41 (September 1986): 17.

<sup>25</sup> Beulah Stauffer Hostetler, *A Community Paradigm: American Mennonites and Protestant Movements* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987), 167.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Floyd Pannabecker, *Open Doors: The History of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1975), 34.

controversy. Gehman and his followers at Upper Milford formed the Evangelical Mennonites in 1853, merged with a group called the United Mennonites in 1879, and finally merged with the “Swankites” to form MBC in 1883.

Mennonite communities in Ontario and Indiana experienced similar insurgencies as Methodists and revivalists spread in geography and influence. Usually encounters between Mennonites and revivalists occurred by way of regional and national holiness associations, Free Methodists, and United Brethren, and other evangelical groups.<sup>27</sup> One such group was the Evangelical Association, the German counterpart to the Methodist movement, which held meetings in far-flung places such as Ontario and Indiana.<sup>28</sup> This denomination aggressively proselytized Mennonites, whom they considered lacking in spiritual depth. Evangelical Association leaders noted that Mennonites “endeavored to lead a quiet, virtuous, peaceable life. But as regards the spiritual life that comes from God, the new birth and the renewal of heart by the Holy Ghost, they were generally ignorant. . . . they were dead and cold.”<sup>29</sup> In 1869 the Evangelical Association won over Solomon Eby of Berlin, Ontario, who soon began holding protracted meetings himself. That he was a Mennonite preacher for thirteen years before he was converted seemed to demonstrate a lack of spiritual fervor of Mennonites during that time.<sup>30</sup> Eby was excommunicated from the Mennonite church several years later for his revivalist views and practices.

The most dramatic transformation—and the one with the most staying power—occurred near Elkhart, Indiana. The crisis was precipitated when Daniel Brenneman and John Krupp visited Solomon Eby’s revival in Ontario. When they returned to Indiana, Krupp immediately began holding meetings near Elkhart in which women testified. More cautious

---

<sup>27</sup> Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974), 60.

<sup>28</sup> William Ward Dean, “John F. Funk and the Mennonite Awakening,” Ph.D. dissertation University of Iowa (June, 1965): 260.

<sup>29</sup> R. Yeakel, *History of the Evangelical Association* (Cleveland, Ohio: Mattill & Lamb, 1902), 409.

<sup>30</sup> C. Henry Smith, *Mennonites of America* Goshen, Ind.: published by the author, 1909), 312.

than Krupp, Brenneman made a second trip to Canada to investigate. Upon his return, he discovered that Krupp had been excommunicated because “he favored protracted meetings and even allowed women to testify.”<sup>31</sup> Instead of shunning Krupp, Brenneman decided to work with him.

For Brenneman, things boiled over when John F. Funk, a co-laborer with Brenneman in innovative evangelism and perhaps the strongest Mennonite leader in the region, visited one of the Krupp-Brenneman revival meetings. The emotionalism and techniques employed were too much even for the otherwise-progressive Funk. He described the meeting in his diary on March 15, 1874: “The meetings held were such prayer meetings in which much ado was made, loud crying and weeping—howling that could be heard a long distance—half a mile. Sitting or lying on the floor and making a great confusion. S. Sherk said, there comes the Lord! Catch Him quick—folly, when the Lord comes he will come in judgment.”<sup>32</sup> Funk’s primary concerns upon observing this meeting were its potential for impure theology and for disunity in the denomination.<sup>33</sup>

The revival meetings continued, and Funk began to preach against them in church services. During one of the meetings called to resolve the conflict between Brenneman and the majority of the preachers, “Daniel Brenneman was weeping bitter tears” defending his revivalist techniques as “Funk with both hands in his pockets paced the floor, and with all the language at his command, gave reasons for deferring progressive methods.”<sup>34</sup> Brenneman, who fainted when he heard the news, was officially expelled from the Mennonite Church at the Indiana District Conference on April 25, 1874.<sup>35</sup> Among the reasons given by the ministers was the following: “He began to teach and practice customs which we hold

---

<sup>31</sup> Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 43.

<sup>32</sup> Diary, March 15, 1874. Quoted in Dean, “John F. Funk,” 259.

<sup>33</sup> Dean, “John F. Funk,” 257.

<sup>34</sup> Timothy Brenneman, “Reminiscences of John F. Funk,” *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Historical Committee of Mennonite General Conference), IX (July 1948), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Tom Price, “Schism! Sunday School Divided First Mennonite Church,” *Elkhart Truth*, June 3, 1995, B4.

unscriptural (I Timothy 2:11,12; I Corinthians 14:34-35) and which never have been sanction [sic] by the church.” Thus, the innovation of women visibly participating in the religious life of the church helped launch MBC and a generation of “ministering sisters.”

Brenneman declined to join the groups—the Methodistic Evangelical Association or the Free Methodists—that had influenced his revival because they allowed warfare, baptized infants, and didn’t practice feet-washing.<sup>36</sup> Instead, Brenneman allied with like-minded disenfranchised Mennonites to form their own association that combined Mennonite and Methodist teachings.<sup>37</sup> The new group was formed in 1883 and was comprised of preachers primarily from the East. These preachers held various affiliations including River Brethren in Christ of Ohio (“Swankites”), Evangelical Mennonites from Pennsylvania, United Mennonites (New Mennonites from Ontario and Reformed Mennonites from Ontario and Indiana), and Evangelical United Mennonites (formed from Evangelical Mennonites and United Mennonites).

This new denomination, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, was fashioned out of the above groups with a disparate geography, but all in protest against the formalism and hierarchies of the Mennonite Church. Brenneman represented many of these disgruntled Mennonites ready for change. The influence of holiness groups made them impatient for four-part singing, camp meetings, Sunday School classes, and services spoken in English. The traditional view of women in leadership was one of those points of impatience. Still, that MBC began out of conflict with a traditional mother church made it easier to incorporate the innovation of female leaders into their ecclesiology.

---

<sup>36</sup> Schlabach, *Nation*, 114.

<sup>37</sup> One of the other Mennonite groups, the United Mennonite Church, nearly joined the Northern Indiana Eldership of the Church of God, a holiness association, but never consummated the merger despite having agreed upon all the necessary resolutions.

*Emphasis on experience*

One of the distinct points of conflict with the Mennonite Church for founding MBC leaders was the nature of religious expression. The free-flowing, emotional character of MBC worship with its emphasis on experience stood in stark contrast to the formalism of Mennonites, who took pride in their long, austere services. This new way to express faith came from holiness and Methodist influences and advanced an ethos in which women could participate publicly in the life of the church.

Contact in the late 1860s and 1870s with regional holiness associations in Pennsylvania, Ontario, and Indiana launched the new denomination and initiated the emphasis on experiential spirituality.<sup>38</sup> And MBC quickly learned the language and practices of its tutor. Preachers and writers invoked the Holy Spirit more frequently than before, warning believers not to suppress its influence. B. Bowman wrote in the *Gospel Banner*, “If, however, the Spirit comes as a rushing mighty wind and any are swept away, and act like drunken men, as they will likely do, be submissive, don’t try to rule out the Holy Ghost as many do.”<sup>39</sup> Actions that might accompany the indwelling of the Spirit, Bowman suggested, included running, shouting, laughing, screaming, jumping, and the loss of strength. MBC leaders did not talk about these manifestations as hypothetical possibilities. The *Gospel Banner* was full of testimonies of the Holy Spirit. One woman wrote, “The power of the Lord came upon me, I fell over, was powerless, they said, for an hour, and glory be to God, when I recovered the burden was gone.”<sup>40</sup> Such words and actions were commonplace in the revivals and camp meetings of the Great Awakenings of the nineteenth century.

---

<sup>38</sup> In *Perfectionist Persuasion*, Charles Jones also cites influence from Free Methodists, United Brethren, and Evangelicals in the northern Midwest (60).

<sup>39</sup> B. Bowman, *Gospel Banner* (January 1879), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Esther Sherk, “Testimony,” *Gospel Banner* (May 1879), 5.

The MBC adopted camp meetings as a critical component of their ecclesiology almost immediately upon its founding. Calling protracted meetings “. . . an especially beneficial means to bring sinners to repentance and conversion,” denominational leaders quickly added camp meetings to their agenda. The first camp meeting, at Fetter’s Grove in Elkhart County in 1880, had the markings of authentic tent revivalism: nineteen tents in a grove of maple trees, hundreds of rows of rough plank seats, oat and wheat straw for the “sawdust trail,” and a mourner’s bench.<sup>41</sup> The first of many camp meetings to be held at Fetter’s Grove drew more than 3,000 people for ten days. Observers called the meetings “usually intense and emotional.”<sup>42</sup>

Amid the din of physical worship in such an unorthodox setting, women found less opposition to public expression. Just as women began to speak and even preach in holiness revivals, women also began to participate in the emerging MBC denomination. After all, it was a short step from a shriek to a coherent utterance, particularly when a woman could hold the Spirit responsible for her behavior. So women in the MBC began to publicly speak and teach almost immediately. And like holiness women before them, they maintained that the Spirit mandated their speech: “Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?”<sup>43</sup>

Reliance upon the Spirit in structuring behavior in church soon made its impact on the selection of ministers. In 1875 one of the denominations that later fed into the MBC made a change in how ministers were chosen. If a brother “believed himself to have been called of God to the ministry,” he was to make that call known, and the church would then approve that

---

<sup>41</sup> Lageer, *Merging Streams*, 66.

<sup>42</sup> *100 Years of Spiritual Growth* (Elkhart, IN: Bethel Publishing, 1980), 5.

<sup>43</sup> Elizabeth Risdon, “Letter,” *Gospel Banner* 4 (April 15, 1881), 62.

call.<sup>44</sup> This was a striking difference from their Mennonite heritage in which a man would wait to verbalize a call until he had been chosen and elected by the church, often by way of the lot. Each individual in a Mennonite congregation nominated candidates. The top vote-getters then pulled songbooks from a table during a church service. The candidate who found a slip of paper with a verse in it (“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”) became a minister.<sup>45</sup> Through both methods the Spirit was allowed to operate, but MBC placed more emphasis on the experience and call of the individual. So while the 1875 resolution made no provision for the selection of women, it was a critical step toward that possibility.

From the start of the MBC movement women were encouraged to actively verbalize and demonstrate faith. But it took a nearly a decade from the time most of the founding members of MBC were excommunicated from the Mennonite body until women were able to formalize their new freedom through licensure. In 1883 22-year-old Janet Douglas became the first woman preacher in the new denomination. Just two years after being converted, Douglas heard a call from God to preach. Initially, she resisted. But soon she rented a small hall in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and preached to contacts she made by visiting homes in surrounding neighborhoods with holiness evangelist S.B. Shaw. A history of the United Missionary Church written nearly a century later described her nascent ministry: “Miss Douglas scarcely knew how to preach, her services consisting mainly of testimonies, followed by a ten- or twelve-minute sermon. God blessed the meetings, however, and more than one hundred professed to be converted. . . .”<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Jasper Abraham Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church* (New Carlisle, Ohio: Bethel Publishing Co., 1920), 163.

<sup>45</sup> Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War*, 63.

<sup>46</sup> Everek R. Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 251.

Denominational leaders encouraged her first wobbly steps both ecclesiastically and theologically. The April 1, 1884, issue of the *Gospel Banner* describes her licensure by the Indiana-Ohio-Michigan Conference of MBC:

Janet Douglas, of Kent County, Michigan, having received a permit from the quarterly conference of that place to labor as an evangelist, has, during her several months' labors, been the means of leading seventy souls to Christ. Hence, upon the evidence of her good moral character and devotions to the cause of Christ, and of her efficiency as a co-worker in the vineyard of the Lord, is recognized by the conference as an evangelist.<sup>47</sup>

The following year the Indiana District of MBC named Douglas a "mission worker," sent her to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and approved a resolution that "women have a right to go forth and labor in the vineyard of the Lord. . . ."<sup>48</sup>

Douglas's disclosure of her call and her subsequent foray into public religious service launched a rapid increase of women preachers. By the end of 1885, the number of women preachers had grown to three, possibly four, within the conferences of MBC. One of them was Mary Ann Hallman from Ontario, where Solomon Eby was continuing his revival ministry. She felt a conviction to preach so deeply that she was compelled "to go or to lose her soul." The daughter of members of the Old Mennonite Church from which Eby had been expelled, Hallman risked parental wrath if she acted upon her call. Her parents were "bitterly opposed to women preaching, and although pious people, looked upon the conduct of their daughter as a disgrace."<sup>49</sup> They threatened to toss her out of their home if she continued.

This opposition to Hallman and the ministry of women in general was replicated throughout areas where the early MBC church ministered. But the growing importance of subjective experience mediated by the Spirit gave many women the courage to act upon their calls. A culture of women testifying in public coupled with the transition in how ministers

---

<sup>47</sup> *Gospel Banner* 7 (April 1, 1884), 52.

<sup>48</sup> Eileen Lageer, *Merging Streams*, 76.

<sup>49</sup> Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church*, 151.

were selected both worked powerfully in leading women to more significant spiritual leadership.

*Theology of perfection*

The holiness emphasis on perfection and entire sanctification added theological grounds to the ecclesiastical support lent to MBC women. John Wesley introduced into the American context the idea that a believer can arrive at a state of perfect love and obedience to God. Distinct from and experienced after justification—or “getting saved”—the arrival at a state of perfection was variously called entire sanctification or the “second blessing.” Historian Donald Dayton argues that the theological particularity of perfectionism is critically important, that it “is the clue that unlocks many mysteries of this period” in regard to women in ministry in the 1800s.<sup>50</sup>

Previously ignored by Mennonites, perfectionist theology was quickly assumed by MBC as conveyed to them by the Methodist evangelist Phoebe Palmer and from the writings of other holiness advocates like A. Sims, George D. Watson, and John S. Inskip.<sup>51</sup> Even in its earliest constitutions, MBC emphasized this “instantaneous act of God” that “excludes depravity and all unrighteousness from the heart.”<sup>52</sup> And they used the theological basis of this doctrine to defend a prominent role for women.

Specifically, advocates of perfectionism heralded the newness and transforming power of the Spirit to form a new “dispensation” in individuals and societies. Jesus’s coming and the establishment of the New Testament church, perfectionists asserted, ushered in an era that hearkened back to Eden. In addition to the possibility of persons reaching sinless perfection like Adam and Eve before the Fall, the new dispensation also meant that new and better

---

<sup>50</sup> Dayton, *Holiness Tracts*, vii.

<sup>51</sup> Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church*, 163.

<sup>52</sup> *Constitution of General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren of Christ Church* (1885), 21.

societies could be formed. Perfectionists taught that Jesus trumped the old, imperfect covenant of Hebrew scripture (and even the Jewish-inspired Paul). Thus, institutions like slavery and male dominance were open to severe critique. Perfectionists distinguished between the way things were as opposed to the way they ought to be. So even though slavery might have been employed in the Old Testament, Jesus mandated a new way of structuring society. Dayton writes that for advocates of perfectionism the subordination of women “was merely descriptive of the sinful state in which we find ourselves and without any normative value.”<sup>53</sup>

That contemporary culture (and biblical culture) subordinated women doesn’t make subordination—or even restrictions of female public leadership—a right doctrine, holiness thinkers held. In fact, they believed, women should be released and commanded to pursue active public service to God, though many disapproved of full equality with men. Palmer, in her defense of women speaking in public, *The Promise of the Father*, argued that everyone was charged to preach the Gospel of Christ. And the same Spirit which commanded every man, woman, and child in New Testament times was still available in this continuing dispensation.<sup>54</sup> It was not a long step from this assertion to Palmer’s striking conclusion: “O, the endless weight of responsibility with which the church is pressing herself earthward through the depressing influences of this error! How can she rise while the gifts of three-fourths of her membership are sepulchred in her midst?”<sup>55</sup>

This logic was familiar to MBC; they had been using reasoning similar to perfectionism to defend their nonresistant stance. A new dispensation, distinct from the bloody Old Testament, ushered in by the first coming of Jesus brought peace and an end to

---

<sup>53</sup> Dayton, *Holiness Tracts*, viii.

<sup>54</sup> Lucille Sider Dayton and Donald W. Dayton, “‘Your Daughters Shall Prophesy’: Feminism in the Holiness Movement,” *Modern American Protestantism and its World: Women and Women’s Issues* (New York: K.G. Saur, 1993), 241.

<sup>55</sup> Phoebe Palmer, *The Promise of the Father* (1859), 347.

the violence of the old dispensation. Not surprisingly, MBC saw the same phenomenon at work in regard to the subordination of women. In an 1881 *Gospel Banner* article, Elizabeth Risdon wrote,

Thanks be to God for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who maketh all equal in Him, whether high or low, rich or poor. We find that in heathen countries woman is no better, yea, even treated with greater contempt than a gally [sic] slave, and nothing but the Gospel of Jesus Christ entering into these benighted homes, can restore her to be, indeed, a true helpmeet for man, his equal, as God designed her to be in the beginning. The curse of bondage is removed and she is free.<sup>56</sup>

An article in the *Gospel Banner* four years later similarly read, “But when the fullness of the time came, and God sent forth his Son to be born of a woman, as well as under the law, then was woman herself emancipated, and restored to her paradisaical equality with man.”<sup>57</sup>

To be sure, not all MBC leaders and members viewed women as under “the curse of bondage” like Palmer and Risdon did. As I contend later, some MBC constituents sounded enough patriarchal and anti-female leadership rhetoric that compromise was needed in the denomination. But the holiness-inspired perfectionism of many MBC leaders led them to understand the coming of Jesus as releasing women for extensive service as the Church moved toward a final consummation with God. For many, the possibility of perfection in a new dispensation demanded that all believers preach the Gospel.

### *A staunch biblicism*

Not just protest against traditionalism, the ecstasy of experience, and a theology of perfection shaped MBC’s ecclesiology; MBC was also a denomination of the Book. Appeal to scripture was not new for advocates of women preachers. Catherine Brekus shows that

---

<sup>56</sup> Elizabeth Risdon, “Letter,” *Gospel Banner* 4 (April 15, 1881), 62.

<sup>57</sup> G.D. Boardman in *S.S. Times*, reprinted in , “Woman’s Place in the Early Church” 18 *Gospel Banner* (\_\_\_\_): 12.

eighteenth-century women preachers defended their work not on the basis of natural right, but on biblical grounds.<sup>58</sup> Nancy Hardesty succinctly writes that holiness groups “monitored their experience by Scripture and Scripture by their experience.”<sup>59</sup> MBC also inherited this strong loyalty to Scripture from the holiness tradition, which many used to defend vigorously the practice of women preaching. Nearly a dozen lengthy articles in the 1880s and 1890s appeared in the *Gospel Banner* defending the right and necessity of women in public ministry. Each one used Scripture extensively, keeping MBC in the main stream of holiness women pushing for female participation. Like their holiness brethren, MBC leaders primarily used Scripture to justify the new radical idea of bringing women out of the pews onto the platform.

Not all women struggling to rise out of subordination in this era used the Bible in orthodox ways. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, led a committee that published the two-volume *Woman's Bible*, a rewritten and essentially heretical commentary of the Bible. The anticlerical work dismissed the entire second chapter of Genesis, viewing the creation of Eve out of Adam's ribs as a “petty surgical operation.”<sup>60</sup> This radical departure from orthodox interpretation of Scripture received only a small audience in evangelical circles, yet it contained elements similar to the hermeneutic maneuverings of evangelicals interested in rescuing the role of women.

Phoebe Palmer, for example, exhibited an orthodox bibliocentricity while avoiding what she saw as an overly wooden interpretation of Scripture. In her oft-quoted treatise defending women's ministry, she wrote that Protestants don't believe that Jesus literally meant “This is my body broken for you.” Why then, she asked, do Protestants literally read Paul's admonition for women to keep silent? She maintained that both transubstantiation and

---

<sup>58</sup> Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 6-7.

<sup>59</sup> Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville, Ten.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 54.

<sup>60</sup> Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993): 37-38.

silent women were “relics of Popery.”<sup>61</sup> A common sense, sometimes non-literal reading of Scripture with a heart attuned to Holy Spirit-guided experience was to Palmer—and other evangelical proponents of women preaching like Luther Lee, B.T. Roberts, Catherine Booth, and Fannie McDowell Hunter—the best way to understand the role of women in the church.

MBC likewise capitalized on non-literal, thematic approaches to Scripture. John Krupp, one of the founding ministers, emphasized instances in the Old and New Testaments of women prophesying and “laboring” (to use MBC nomenclature) for women ministry. Even more passionate were MBC’s refutations of Paul, particularly his writing in I Corinthians to “Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also says the law.”<sup>62</sup> Krupp and others typically advanced the argument that Paul was addressing only disorderly conduct by women. He and others also argued that to be consistent, advocates of female silence in church must also practice the holy kiss, an activity that MBC members apparently were not practicing.<sup>63</sup> In a talk given before the Pennsylvania conference of the MBC in 1894, C.H. Brunner said, “He [Paul] has in view not those under the influence and command of the Holy Ghost, but the disobedient and disorderly, pronouncing shame upon them for causing confusion . . .”<sup>64</sup> In short, Krupp, Brunner, and others argued that these biblical passages were to be taken literally by the Corinthians, but were non-binding for today’s believers. Combining the authority of the Spirit and the denial of Paul’s command as a trans-dispensational rule, MBC leaders insisted that Pauline mandates to women be understood in the context of broader biblical themes and contemporary experience.

---

<sup>61</sup> Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness*, 57.

<sup>62</sup> John Krupp, “Women Speaking in Church,” *Gospel Banner* 1 (October 1878): 5.

<sup>63</sup> “The Devil goes to Prayer-Meeting,” *Gospel Banner* 18 (March 26, 1895): 205.

<sup>64</sup> C.H. Brunner, “What was the Sisters’ Work in the Apostolic Church?” *Gospel Banner* 17 (February 27, 1894): 14.

The embrace of perfection, an experience-oriented faith, and staunch biblicism as well as a rejection of traditionalism within MBC were all rooted in holiness influence. And each worked powerfully to encourage MBC women to assume public roles of ministry. The MBC-holiness exchange also demonstrates something about the nature of the holiness movement—that it was pervasive and far-reaching, even on ghettoed groups like discontented Mennonites.<sup>65</sup>

### **Sympathy with reform**

A force less influential than holiness but still significant also drove MBC toward advocacy of a greater participation of women in church leadership. This was not primarily a scriptural-based appeal. Rather, it was sympathy with the feminist reform efforts of women like Frances Willard and Catherine Booth, and it showed itself in equal-rights language promulgated in the *Gospel Banner*. Once holiness had broken new ground for women, this new rhetoric helped push even more of them into active ministry in reform, evangelism, and pastoral roles.

Through the 1890s the *Gospel Banner* devoted an entire page each issue to reform concerns. Topics ranged from advocacy of temperance to anti-smoking to labor reform. The articles often cited reform-oriented journals, and editors frequently reprinted selections from papers such as *Christian Cynosure*, *British Workman*, and the *National Temperance Society*. Women held an integral position in these reform initiatives, often writing articles or responding to articles in subsequent issues. They also pioneered the implementation of this

---

<sup>65</sup> The key role of holiness influence in elevating MBC women in ministry is also clear, particularly when MBC is compared to the Missionary Church Association, a group that in 1969 merged with MBC (though by 1969 MBC was known as the United Mennonites). MCA was influenced more by A.B. Simpson's Keswick-holiness teaching of the four-fold gospel and the "deeper life," which limited Wesleyan perfectionism. Identification with Keswick instead of Wesleyan holiness might explain why far fewer women ministers were licensed in MCA than MBC, though Simpson himself was in favor of women in ministry. Another reason why MCA licensed fewer women is because of MCA's Amish roots. Likely, this resulted in a more cautious approach toward innovation.

rhetoric, moving to large and mid-size cities like Pontiac, Cleveland, Grand Rapids, and Dayton to work toward spiritual and social reform. Denominational historian Eileen Lageer describes how single women “moved into a town two by two, rented a store or empty hall and took up residence . . .”<sup>66</sup> They held services nearly every night of the week, visited the sick, gave food to the poor, and invaded saloons trying to dissuade patrons to give up alcohol. Reform efforts worked in tandem with preaching the gospel, though conversion, in MBC’s eyes, was always the most effective tool toward reform. It was also always more important than reform.

Scholars are discovering, though, that this new rhetoric came from a not-so new source. Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, for example, suggests that one of the most prominent reform organizations, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), was rooted directly in Methodism.<sup>67</sup> Methodist representation in WCTU was common, and the leader of WCTU, Frances Willard, was a card-carrying holiness convert. None other than Phoebe Palmer had converted Willard during an evangelistic meeting in Evanston, Illinois, in the 1860s. Gifford notes that Willard and others in WCTU and similar reform organizations used language and behaved in ways that make known their evangelical/holiness commitments. This holiness-reform connection perhaps was the hook that snagged many in MBC and led some in the denomination to adopt more than holiness ideas.

Association and identification with the reform movement exposed MBC to some of its more radical feminist figures and sentiments. Willard, for instance, opposed non-inclusive language and a woman’s subordination to her husband, and she advocated women’s

---

<sup>66</sup> Eileen Lageer, *Merging Streams* (Bethel Publishing, 1979).

<sup>67</sup> Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, “Sisterhoods of Service and Reform,” *Modern American Protestantism and its World: Women and Women’s Issues* (New York: K.G. Saur, 1993), 174.

ordination, a step MBC was yet unwilling to take.<sup>68</sup> Willard's rhetoric made its mark on MBC women and men. The *Gospel Banner* published several of Willard's articles recognizing that terminology shapes views of gender. One such article used rather flamboyant language to denounce the word "female," declaring it disrespectful to women. Current usage of "female," Willard wrote, "applies equally to a hen and to the mother of Oliver Cromwell."<sup>69</sup> In an article aimed at keeping women from abuse in factories and from prostitution, she wrote, "Let a woman be called a woman, and if I had the power a statue should declare it."<sup>70</sup> Exposure to this brand of activist rhetoric triggered new language and a broad expansion of women's activity within MBC itself.

This more insistent pro-woman rhetoric stemmed from two new fundamental claims: the assertion that men were morally corrupt and lazy and the recognition of women's capabilities. Women in the *Gospel Banner* called for "real men," men who were "clean from the smell of whisky, free from the fumes of tobacco and delivered from the bonds of a double life." Accusations of male hypocrisy abounded: "There are too many men to-day living the life of the double standard, demanding of their wives and sisters a morality they have no thought of living up to themselves."<sup>71</sup> Men were portrayed also as lazy, even stupid: "While men are scratching their heads and proving what is not the work of women, the way is being prepared for the coming of the kingdom. Mark you, while they do the theorizing and say women are not to do this, the churches are sending them."<sup>72</sup> Women, on the other hand, were characterized as having already reached a level of purity toward which only a repentant,

---

<sup>68</sup> Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books, 1986): 101.

<sup>69</sup> Frances E. Willard, "Work for Purity," *Gospel Banner* 18 (November 26, 1895), 15. Quoted from the *Philanthropist*.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> "The New Man," *Gospel Banner* 18 (December 3, 1895), 15.

<sup>72</sup> "Women's Work," *Gospel Banner* 23 (January 9, 1900), 5, quoted from *The Revivalist*.

reworked man could aspire. One writer called for this reformation of men so they could be worthy of greeting a “bride in the whiteness of her unspotted womanhood . . .”<sup>73</sup>

Perceptions of the virtue of women thrived in MBC and became the basis for the extension of female influence outside the home. Ideas of virtue and purity triggered visions of women doing great things for God and society. One MBC leader proclaimed, “Under the blessed spirit of Christianity they have equal rights, equal privileges, equal blessings, and allow me to add, they are equally useful.”<sup>74</sup> The visions quickly turned to reality before their very eyes. Not only did thousands of MBC members read hundreds of testimonies and articles by and about women preachers, but an increasing number of members also experienced female pastoral leadership themselves. Jacob Hygema, who later became an MBC preacher himself (and then a professor at the denominational school, Fort Wayne Bible Institute), was converted by the holiness preacher Laura Mains. In his testimony printed several years later in the *Gospel Banner*, he wrote, “The joy was not so great immediately, but the following day an unutterable joy filled my soul as I sent the news by numbers of letters to my friends in Indiana. My prejudice against women speaking received a terrible blow that night, having been converted among only women . . .”<sup>75</sup> The positive nature of women was bolstered, and this resulted in an environment conducive to women in ministry. Though opponents of female spiritual and ecclesiastical leadership might muster theological or biblical arguments, they could hardly deny the effective and sweeping ministry of MBC women throughout the Midwest. Souls were being saved, and God seemed to be blessing their ministry.

Unusual about the new reform influences was that it created a rationale for women in MBC to begin to break out of a separate-spheres gender model. Not only could women

---

<sup>73</sup> “The New Man,” *Gospel Banner* 18 (December 3, 1895), 15.

<sup>74</sup> C.H. Brunner, “What was the Sisters’ Work in the Apostolic Church?” *Gospel Banner* 17 (February 27, 1894): 15.

<sup>75</sup> Jacob Hygema, “Letter,” *Gospel Banner* 18 (October 1, 1895), 11

preach, but they could earn money and be equal to men too. One writer asserted, “Now, we say if there be any preference in occupation, let woman have it.”<sup>76</sup> Whether or not women in MBC began to assume bread-winning roles is unclear. What is clear is that this equal-rights language provided further ideological support for the burgeoning ministries of women like Janet Douglass and Mary Ann Hallman. These two pioneers were quickly joined by dozens of women. From 1890 to 1910 licensed female ministers in MBC rose from five to 220, a remarkable jump of 4,400%. Many MBC writers began to claim in the 1890s something much more than the right of women to preach; they argued that women were inherently equal to men and deserving of the same opportunities. The denomination as a whole didn’t accept the claim, but these assertions inspired many women like Mae Shupe to work as if they were.

### **Denominational compromise**

That women were newly permitted to share in the privilege of ministry with men in MBC reflects the transformation of ideas of gender in broader society as well as in some segments of the church. As the proportion of employed women increased from 14.7 to 24.8 percent from 1880 to 1910,<sup>77</sup> patterns of rhetoric and practice within MBC reveal a denomination caught between the competing tensions of a two-sphere model and an impulse of female equality. Beyond association with holiness theology and a reform ethos, certain denominational particulars provided for a rise in female participation in ministry. Ironically, traces of restraint and compromise on the part of denominational leaders interested in releasing women for ministry in the end allowed women to preach and exhort with extraordinary frequency and sway.

---

<sup>76</sup> “Women’s Opportunities,” reprinted from *Christian Herald*, GB 18 (December 3, 1895), 6.

<sup>77</sup> Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 25.

Early denominational leaders staunchly supported women in ministry. Daniel Brenneman, in particular, facilitated training for women and helped launch their ministries. As many young MBC women attended holiness Bible schools, Brenneman organized several groups of them into ministry teams. One of them remarked, “It was easy to go to him with our troubles and difficulties.”<sup>78</sup> The nurture of MBC leadership toward women gave women nearly unrestricted access to every kind of ministry in the denomination. Within years of its formation, women preached in city missions, camp meetings, and in denominational gatherings. They wrote in conference journals, including the *Gospel Banner*, which was edited by Brenneman. They founded and administrated city missions, schools such as the Michigan Holiness School, and organizations such as the Gospel Worker Society. And they were sent abroad as missionaries. The pages of *Gospel Banner* are full of energetic reports of success and failures of women. By facilitating a support network for young female preachers, MBC leaders launched an unprecedented jump in ministry activity by women.

But even within this welcoming constituency, MBC harbored pockets of opposition. Much of the opposition cropped up in traditional Mennonite communities, and much of it from members with a traditional Mennonite background. One denominational historian wrote of Janet Douglas, “In some quarters she received little encouragement, and on one occasion a lady advised her to ‘let the men preach, and go home and help your mother.’”<sup>79</sup> In Muncy, Pennsylvania, an MBC woman preacher, a Mrs. L. Musselman, was accused of being a witch, undoubtedly the result of locals unfamiliar with seeing a woman preach with such popularity and effect.<sup>80</sup> A.J. Huffman, another denominational historian, notes that “the opposition to women preaching was quite general, at first, despite the evangelistic spirit of the church, but

---

<sup>78</sup> Eileen Lageer, *Merging Streams*, 76.

<sup>79</sup> Storms, *History of the United Missionary Church*, 251.

<sup>80</sup> “Ho! Ho! What Next! Muncy again taking the lead.” *Gospel Banner* 22 (December 26, 1899), 10.

the prejudice was gradually overcome. Those who received a call of God to preach later did not have this difficulty to encounter.”<sup>81</sup>

If some MBC members were uncomfortable at first with women preaching, even more were uncomfortable with the equal-rights language used in the *Gospel Banner* in the 1890s. Articles lauding domesticity, homemaking, and submissive wives proliferated, running alongside equal-rights rhetoric. A model wife, one writer asserted, is one “who looks after his household, and makes her hospitality a delight to him . . .”<sup>82</sup> Another defended homemaking as a legitimate occupation: “It is as honorable to sweep the house, make beds or trim hats as it is to twist a watch-chain.”<sup>83</sup>

Even those who extended a woman’s right to work outside the home as a preacher or worker assumed that she would continue to keep house. While defending the right of women to work outside the home, one MBC writer lamenting the fact that women work outside the home wrote, “How can there be a proper home life, with the wife and mother at work all day in a factory?”<sup>84</sup> Another writer took a mediated position of encouraging women to “publish salvation”—to preach—and to “be domestic.”<sup>85</sup>

This incongruity in views of gender roles in MBC held the potential to quash the rise of women in ministry. Instead, the denominational leadership’s ability to compromise between two competing inclinations among its constituents resulted in numbers of women preachers and church workers that dwarfed most other denominations.

First, MBC leaders modestly limited the responsibilities of women in leadership. From the beginning of the denomination, women were excluded from full ordination. The

---

<sup>81</sup> J.A. Huffman, *History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church*, 152.

<sup>82</sup> “What is a Model Wife?” *Gospel Banner* 16 (March 21, 1893): 4.

<sup>83</sup> “Women’s Opportunities,” *Gospel Banner* 18 (December 3, 1895), 6.

<sup>84</sup> Mary G. Stuckenberg, “Our Working Women,” *Gospel Banner* 19 (March 3, 1896) 14, reprinted from *Union Signal*.

<sup>85</sup> “A Bible Portrait of Woman,” *Gospel Banner* 25 (August 23, 1902), 6.

constitution adopted in 1880 stated, “They shall be received . . . except ordination.”<sup>86</sup> Like men, they were officially licensed as evangelists, helpers and missionaries. But beyond licensure women, upon passing a reading course (the same one as men took) satisfactorily, were recognized only as “approved ministering sisters.”<sup>87</sup> An amendment to the MBC constitution in 1885 clarified that “we permit a sister, chosen of God, to preach and to labor for the salvation of souls, under the supervision of a minister or presiding elder.”<sup>88</sup> This subordinate position did little to limit women in their work as pastors, keeping them only from performing marriage ceremonies and keeping them under the supervision of male headship. These limitations were self-imposed; no legal restrictions by the state kept women from officiating weddings.

Furthermore, MBC policy stated that women were to be replaced as pastors of church plants once the congregations were more firmly established. Denominational leaders, feeling heat from gender traditionalists, declined to go completely egalitarian. Even though women could officially fill the office of church pastor, it was expected to be temporary. That men rarely actually replaced women pastors doesn’t remove the intent; it only supports Chaves’s idea of loose coupling, that rules and practice were usually inconsistent. That women participated in the public life of the church at unprecedented levels doesn’t eradicate the traces of women subordination still in MBC. Despite an increase of women in the middle strata of MBC leadership, subordination did not completely end.

Had MBC leaders in favor of full ordination and equal status for women not limited their goals, traditionalists might have revolted. The rhetoric of separate spheres was strong and indicated a sizeable constituency in opposition to full ordination—part of which didn’t

---

<sup>86</sup> “The Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical United Mennonites,” (Goshen, Indiana: E.U. Mennonite Publishing Society, 1880), 72. Archives of the Missionary Church.

<sup>87</sup> “The Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical United Mennonites,” (Goshen, Indiana: E.U. Mennonite Publishing Society, 1880), 72. Archives of the Missionary Church.

<sup>88</sup> “MBC Constitution,” (1885), 6. Archives of the Missionary Church.

affirm women preaching at all. As MBC matured as a denomination and incorporated traditionalists into its midst, the reality of competing parties moderated the founding impulse in favor of women in ministry. The compromise that excluded women from full ordination also allowed for widespread and intense institutionalized participation by women to an extent unprecedented in nineteenth-century America.

### **Assessments**

Max Weber's theory of non-privileged, economically lower-class groups that tend to grant equality to women is, in the case of MBC, inconclusive. Mennonites in Clinton Township in Elkhart County, Indiana, the epicenter of the nascent MBC movement, were of average wealth for the area. With the exception of one wealthy landowner, the total wealth per Mennonite vis-à-vis their neighbors in 1850 was nearly equivalent.<sup>89</sup> Almost exclusively, MBC members from Indiana came out of Elkhart County Mennonites. Though statistics are unavailable, likely less-well-off Mennonites tended to join the movement. They certainly had the least to lose from leaving the self-contained Mennonite social and economic community.

The claim that the economic status of early MBC leaders and members was lower can only be made tentatively. A more interesting lens through which to look is social standing. MBC had several reference groups in the late nineteenth century. Most notable were their holiness connection and their Mennonite heritage. As the MBC movement began its members experienced vastly different social responses from the two.

MBC was socially disprivileged in its relationship from Mennonites. Their excommunication from the Mennonite body meant estrangement from a spiritual and social community in which most members had spent their entire lives. The implications of excommunication became immediately clear. Those expelled did not attend the communion

---

<sup>89</sup> Schlabach, *Nation*, 41.

service held the Sunday after their excommunication. Many of their own families would not eat meals with them.

That MBC no longer associated with the Mennonite hierarchy probably enhanced their broader social standing. For despite Mennonite economic stability, their self-imposed isolation and peculiar beliefs and dress often served to alienate their neighbors. MBC also identified with holiness groups, and identification with them increased their social status. Robert Anderson's distinction between the socialization of holiness and Pentecostalism explains how MBC was able to function fairly effectively in broader society. MBC participated in reform efforts. Writers in the *Gospel Banner* pushed for women's rights, prohibition of alcohol, and health reform much more vigorously than Pentecostals. As Victorian America faded and women began to work, reform efforts on the part of MBC and holiness groups became an advantage in achieving upward social mobility.

That said, MBC stood as a small denomination with tenuous ties to many groups. They identified with certain holiness groups, Mennonites, Dunkards, Quakers, and Free Methodists. But MBC leaders kept a self-imposed distance from them because of disparate theological positions. Thus the groups (such as the Evangelical United Mennonites and the Brethren in Christ) that made up MBC were at the same time disinherited from their social and spiritual heritage and uncomfortable with simply tacking on a new, unfamiliar one. If the ambiguity in Weber's undeveloped thesis, then, allows for the absence of social as well as economic privilege, MBC was unquestionably disprivileged (though admittedly by choice), which may have led to a bent toward women as prophetic equals. But the evidence is sparse enough that MBC should not be used to back Weber's thesis.

Despite Anderson's clear distinction between the Pentecostal and holiness movements, early Pentecostalism and MBC shared several key ideals and characteristics. Each movement

held related theological and ecclesiastical commitments, including a perfectionist orientation and an experiential bent in worship—all of which fit nicely with Dieter’s explanation of how women are able to engage in public ministry. There were, in fact, material links to Pentecostalism as well. Solomon Eby and others from MBC (especially in Canada) eventually joined Pentecostal groups. It is, therefore, not surprising that Grant Wacker’s framework of primitivism and pragmatism in tension works nicely in the case of MBC.

The primitivist nature of MBC (as with Pentecostalism) showed itself most clearly in its emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Compared to its Mennonite roots, MBC paid inordinate attention to an active, expressive Holy Spirit. Further, MBC’s unremitting appeal in the *Gospel Banner* to women prophetesses in Scripture and its theology of perfection indicates a preoccupation in returning to first things. MBC preachers and writers appealed often to the New Testament church as a model for church life, citing passages like Luke 2:36, Acts 21:8, Romans 16:1-12, and Philippians 4:2 as evidences of women prophetesses and church workers. The pre-Fall, Edenic world of Adam and Eve also became an ideal. A primitivist bent led them to consider the possibility of a more-perfect, egalitarian world.

Pragmatism, though, mostly drove the rise of women in MBC ecclesiastical life. The primitivist desire to save society and souls despite its potential offensiveness to culture induced pragmatic methods. The perception of women’s pure spirituality and “unspotted womanhood” necessitated (for the good of the church, advocates said) female involvement in public ministry. Observations and personal experience of effective female ministry led leaders and constituents to reason, “We need more preachers, so let’s use women.” By 1894 one leader had concluded that “women are equally useful.”<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> C.H. Brunner, “What was the Sisters’ Work in the Apostolic Church?” *Gospel Banner* 17 (February 27, 1894): 15.

MBC also selectively accommodated culture in ways that permitted them to fend off division within the denomination. Parts of MBC adapted to the reform efforts of the holiness movement. Parts held back, instead clinging to the shared ideals of Mennonite traditionalism and the Victorian age. In traditional Mennonite communities, men held most leadership posts. In transitional city environments more open to change, women preachers flourished—lasting far longer than they were supposed as senior pastors. These impulses in tension provided for strategic discontinuity and allowed dissenting parties to strike a pragmatic compromise (a separate, but nearly equal role for women), which, in tandem with a primitivist orientation, ultimately resulted in even greater numbers of female ministers at the turn of the century.

The value of Mark Chaves's helpfully specific study of women's ordination is less clear. The case of MBC indicates that he is on target in his assertions about the formidable external pressures of interdenominational alliances and the women's movement. The alliances MBC formed with holiness groups like the Methodists were less formal, often haphazard, and less an alliance than they were one-way proselytizing. Yet the function was essentially the same. Holiness influence in the form of perfection, experience, and protest against traditionalism triggered the rise of women in MBC. The women's reform movement functioned in much the same way; reading Catherine Booth and Frances Willard made MBC susceptible to sympathy with egalitarian ideals. In more vernacular terms, hanging out with Phoebe Palmer at camp meetings gave MBC women and leaders certain ideas about the potential of women.

Chaves's appeals to internal pressures are less convincing. For Chaves, women's organizations function as a steppingstone or back-door approach toward ordination. He sees these societies as willing to take on the promotion of women in ministry leadership, thus providing women with enhanced power within denominational power structures. Autonomous

women's organizations certainly were significant in MBC. The Gospel Workers Society earned showy spreads in the *Gospel Banner*—but not until 1912. In short, the timing is off. Women ministers in MBC seem to have launched the Gospel Workers Society, not vice versa.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, the case of MBC violates Chaves's hypothesis of centralization. He argues that decentralized denominations tend to ordain women more than top-down oriented bodies. Chaves writes that "the presence of only a very few women wanting to be clergy can be enough to force the issue, as long as such women find even one sympathetic congregation or local association."<sup>92</sup>

Though selection of ministers began at the congregational level, the rules of ordination and licensure were clear and were imposed by the denomination's ministerial body. Once a prospective minister had announced his call and a congregation had approved the candidate, he (or she) was presented before the denomination. The "presiding elder" examined the candidate and if two-thirds of the ministerial body approved, the candidate received a license. Ordination was granted only after completing an "examination on discipline."<sup>93</sup> MBC's government controlled more than licensure and ordination. The General Conference, the highest authority in MBC, met several times a year, actively debated theological questions, and administrated mission projects. MBC, in keeping with its Methodistic leanings and its Mennonite hierarchical structure, appropriated centralization as readily as holiness sensibilities and nonresistant stance.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> There may be more validity to Chaves's claim on the MCA side, since J.A. Sprunger's Light and Hope Deaconesses often went on to ministry in MCA or MBC.

<sup>92</sup> Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 140.

<sup>93</sup> "The Doctrines and Disciplines of the Evangelical United Mennonites" (Goshen, Ind.: E.U. Mennonite Publishing Society, 1880), 69.

<sup>94</sup> John Wesley, founder of Methodism, and Francis Asbury were known for their highly centralized style and form of governance.

It appears that in general MBC's treatment of women in leadership is unusual among Protestant denominations (except for holiness groups), particularly in view of MBC's non-privileged status and exploitation of Wacker's primitivist-pragmatic paradigm. Chaves's narrow, intricate hypothesis of formal denominational policy granting full clergy rights to women doesn't fit as well, probably because the case of MBC—and denominations like MBC that came just short of ordaining women—wasn't considered.

But Chaves's neglect reveals a more important story. The case of MBC suggests that its "almost equal" policy actually resulted in more inclusive practice toward women than denominations that endorsed female ordination. Chaves writes that even Congregationalists, Unitarians, and Disciples of Christ, each of which had granted full clergy rights to women by 1888, didn't have a "broad progressive spirit permeating the denomination."<sup>95</sup> MBC, on the other hand, did. And it almost certainly had significantly more female preachers, missionaries, and city workers than denominations who ordained their women early. Perhaps another sociological study would show that the compromise between competing inclinations is what explains this surprising phenomenon in the late nineteenth century. In the meantime Chaves's singular focus on formal denominational policy of ordination obscures MBC's story of a different, perhaps more important kind of female progressivism—the kind that actually released women preachers, pastors, and activists.

## **Epilogue**

This kind of activity on the part of women didn't last long. Within fifteen years of Reverend Mae's fiery egalitarian rhetoric in 1933, just a handful of women ministers remained. Only one woman was licensed in MBC (by then known as the United Missionary Church) after 1955. A year later the Canadian Northwest Conference stripped the right to vote

---

<sup>95</sup> Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 28.

from women ministers whose husbands were also pastors because “they have their interests duly represented through their husbands.”<sup>96</sup> By 1989 women were removed from positions as senior pastor except “in situations of need,” though this rule was already a *de facto* reality. Historian Tim Erdel writes that “by the time the statement was written, the text was actually seen as a bit ‘liberal’ by some who were by now convinced women had no business whatsoever in formal ministry.”<sup>97</sup>

Why the interpretive U-turn after nearly half a century of Janet Douglasses, Mae Shupes, and near egalitarianism? What about the holiness ties, the affinity with reform efforts, and strategic compromise that allowed MBC to include women in ministry leadership so early and with such ease in the late nineteenth century?

Perhaps the very real, but gaudy numbers and flashy exploits of MBC women in the early years of the denomination are a bit misleading. Perhaps the compromise between two competing inclinations that served to elevate the position of women at the same time constructed it on a foundation shakier than the foundations of denominations that recognized full clergy rights. Paradoxically, the pragmatism and political expediency that triggered an unprecedented level of responsibility for women indicates that there wasn’t a principled stand at a formative time in its history.

When fundamentalism hit the scene in the early- and mid-1900s, there was no principle holding MBC to the inclusion of women in leadership. In essence, fundamentalism replaced holiness as its primary reference group. MBC certainly retained much holiness doctrine, but its primary association with Methodism, revivalism, and Simpson’s fourfold gospel was displaced by D.L. Moody, R.A. Torrey, dispensationalism, and an emphasis on

---

<sup>96</sup> Jason C. Garnaat, “Women in Ministry in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ” (Unpublished paper, December 1995), 8.

<sup>97</sup> Tim Erdel, “Pedagogy, Propaganda, Prophetic Protest, and Projection: Dangers and Dilemmas in Writing an Authorized Denominational History,” (Unpublished paper given at Conference on Faith and History, October 2002), 6.

biblical inerrancy and rules of order. These formidable pressures, chronicled by Margaret Bendroth in *Fundamentalism and Gender*, overwhelmed MBC women's public roles by the 1950s.

The story of women in MBC bears an uncanny resemblance to the hundreds of long-lost female preachers Catherine Brekus revealed in *Strangers and Pilgrims*. Her eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century subjects had long, glorious careers as fiery preachers, healers, and shapers of American faith. But within decades of the ends of their careers, most were forgotten by denominations eager to hide evidence of female "enthusiasts." Even women preachers were unaware of their predecessors. Female preaching was an enterprise of discontinuity. Brekus asserts that a separate-sphere model of gender was to blame. Female preachers needed to "lose their 'feminine' identities."<sup>98</sup> Some dressed like men. Some tried to sound like men. Nearly all denounced their femininity. By doing so, Brekus claims, the female hold on ministry was necessarily tenuous.

The practice of denying femininity began to change in the mid-nineteenth century. Brekus writes that "in an ideological shift of stunning proportions, many nineteenth-century evangelicals affirmed that women had a right to preach as *women*."<sup>99</sup> Those who embraced their gender and functioned within a denomination that established formal equality for them were able to create a continuous stream of female ministry. The stream often slowed to a trickle—often nowhere approaching MBC levels—as unofficial discrimination flourished. But those denominations that ordained women in full equality with men retained ordination through the years of fundamentalist pressure.

---

<sup>98</sup> Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 15.

<sup>99</sup> Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 15.

In contrast, the river of MBC women in public ministry slowed to a trickle and then stopped. The reform, same-sphere influences of Frances Willard and Stanton didn't capture enough support within the denomination to establish formal equality. Holiness preacher Phoebe Palmer, who held greater sway upon MBC, supported female preaching. But she did not endorse full equality. As routinization took hold and fundamentalism reared its head in the decades after Palmer, only residues of its nineteenth-century holiness roots and reform sensibilities remained. Once-flourishing, progressive views of gender were not deeply rooted enough to allow women a prominent, public role past its first seventy years of existence. MBC's middle-ground position (represented and helped along by Palmer) between reformist views of gender and traditional Mennonite views of gender eventually silenced radical voices in the wilderness like Shupe, who demanded "rights and privileges. . . . And the right to be ordained . . ." For Shupe and her would-be successors, ordination—and even preaching itself—ceased to be an option because of a pragmatic compromise half a century earlier.

### Bibliography

- 100 Years of Spiritual Growth*. Elkhart, IN: Bethel Publishing, 1980.
- Anderson, Robert Mapes. *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979.
- Bendroth, Margaret Lamberts. *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Brekus, Catherine. *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Brenneman, Timothy. "Reminiscences of John F. Funk." *Mennonite Historical Bulletin* 9 (July 1948): 2.
- Chaves, Mark. *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Dayton, Donald. *Holiness Tracts Defending the Ministry of Women*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985.
- Dayton, Lucille Sider and Dayton, Donald W. "'Your Daughters Shall Prophecy': Feminism in the Holiness Movement." In *Modern American Protestantism and its World: Women and Women's Issues*, edited by Martin E. Marty, 236-261. New York: K.G. Saur, 1993.
- Dean, William Ward. "John F. Funk and the Mennonite Awakening." (Ph.D. dissertation University of Iowa, 1965).
- DeBerg, Betty A. *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- Dieter, Melvin Easterday. *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*. From *Studies in Evangelicalism*, edited by Kenneth E. Rowe and Donald W. Dayton. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980.
- Erdel, Tim. "Pedagogy, Propaganda, Prophetic Protest, and Projection: Dangers and Dilemmas in Writing an Authorized Denominational History." Unpublished paper given at Conference on Faith and History. (October 2002).
- Garnaat, Jason C. "In Memory of Her." *Reflections* 3 (Fall 1995): 4-9.
- Garnaat, Jason C. "Women in Ministry in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ." Unpublished paper. (December 1995).

- Gifford, Carolyn DeSwarte. "Sisterhoods of Service and Reform." *Modern American Protestantism and its World: Women and Women's Issues*. New York: K.G. Saur, 1993.
- Hardesty, Nancy. *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*. Knoxville, Ten.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999.
- Hassey, Janette. *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Ministry around the Turn of the Century*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986.
- Hostetler, Beulah Stauffer. *A Community Paradigm: American Mennonites and Protestant Movements*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1987.
- Huffman, Jasper Abraham. *History of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church*. New Carlisle, Ohio: Bethel Publishing Co., 1920.
- Jones, Charles Edwin. *Perfectionist Persuasion: The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1974.
- Juhnke, James C. "The Role of Women in the Mennonite Transition from Traditionalism to Denominationalism," *Mennonite Life* 41 (September 1986): 17.
- KlingelSmith, Sharon. "Women in the Mennonite Church, 1900-1930." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54 (July 1980), 163.
- Lageer, Eileen. *Merging Streams*. Elkhart, Ind.: Bethel Publishing, 1979.
- Matteson, Esther. "Historical Perspectives." *Reflections* 3 (Fall 1995): 2.
- Murat, A. *Moral and Political Sketch of the United States of North America* (1832), in *The Voluntary Church: American Religious Life, 1740-1860, Seen through the Eyes of European Visitors*, ed. Milton B. Powell. New York, 1967.
- Nesbitt, Paula D. *Feminization of the Clergy in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Palmer, Phoebe. *The Promise of the Father*. 1859.
- Pannabecker, Samuel Floyd. *Open Doors: The History of the General Conference Mennonite Church*. Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1975.
- Price, Tom. "Schism! Sunday School Divided First Mennonite Church." *Elkhart Truth* (June 3, 1995): B4.
- Schlabach, Theron. *Peace, Faith, Nation*. Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1988.
- Smith, C. Henry. *Mennonites of America*. Goshen, Ind.: published by the author, 1909.

Storms, Everek Richard. *History of the United Missionary Church*. Elkhart, Ind.: Bethel Publishing, 1958.

Wacker, Grant. *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Weber, Max. *The Sociology of Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963.

Yeakel, R. *History of the Evangelical Association*. Cleveland, Ohio: Mattill & Lamb, 1902.

**Primary Sources** (Missionary Church Archives at Bethel College, Mishawaka, Ind.)

“A Bible Portrait of Woman.” *Gospel Banner* 25 (August 23, 1902): 6.

Boardman, G.D. “Woman’s Place in the Early Church.” *Gospel Banner* 8 (September 15, 1885): 12. Reprinted from *S.S. Times*.

Bowman, B. *Gospel Banner* 2 (January 1879): 3.

Brunner, C.H. “What was the Sisters’ Work in the Apostolic Church?” *Gospel Banner* 17 (February 27, 1894): 14-15.

“Constitution of General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren of Christ Church.” (General Conference of MBC, 1885).

“The Devil goes to Prayer-Meeting.” *Gospel Banner* 18 (March 26, 1895): 205.

“The Doctrines and Discipline of the Evangelical United Mennonites.” (Goshen, Indiana: Evangelical United Mennonite Publishing Society, 1880).

“Ho! Ho! What Next! Munoy again taking the lead.” *Gospel Banner* 22 (December 26, 1899): 10.

Hygema, Jacob. “Letter.” *Gospel Banner* 18 (October 1, 1895): 11.

Krupp, John. “Women Speaking in Church.” *Gospel Banner* 1 (October 1878): 5.

“The New Man.” *Gospel Banner* 18 (December 3, 1895): 15.

Risdon, Elizabeth. “Letter.” *Gospel Banner* 4 (April 15, 1881): 62.

Sherk, Esther. “Testimony.” *Gospel Banner* 2 (May 1879): 5.

Shupe, Mae. Unpublished paper. 1933.

Stuckenberg, Mary G. “Our Working Women.” *Gospel Banner* 19 (March 3, 1896): 14. Reprinted from *Union Signal*.

“What is a Model Wife?” *Gospel Banner* 16 (March 21, 1893): 4.

Willard, Frances E. “Work for Purity.” *Gospel Banner* 18 (November 26, 1895): 15.  
Reprinted from *Philanthropist*.

“Women’s Opportunities.” *Gospel Banner* 18 (December 3, 1895): 6. Reprinted from  
*Christian Herald*.

“Women’s Work.” *Gospel Banner* 23 (January 9, 1900): 5. Reprinted from *The Revivalist*.